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Human resources management

Placement of staff members serving in the Executive Office of the Secretary-General

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report provides information on the procedures which the Secretary-General intends to put in place for placement of staff members serving in the Executive Office of the Secretary-General. The Secretary-General seeks the approval of the General Assembly for his proposal in this respect.

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1. In section 2, paragraph 5, of its resolution 51/226 of 3 April 1997, the General Assembly stipulated that the discretionary power of the Secretary-General of appointment and promotion outside the established procedures should be limited to his Executive Office and under-secretary-general and assistant secretary-general levels, as well as special envoys at all levels. The Secretary-General considers it necessary to draw to the attention of the General Assembly an issue related to staff members at levels D-2 and below. The present legislation covers the situation of appointments to the Executive Office of the Secretary-General but does not contain a corollary authority for assignment from that Office when the services of staff are no longer needed.

2. The "established procedures" provide for open competition facilitated by the publication of vacancy announcements, except for lateral moves within departments, which may be authorized directly by heads of department using their discretion. Effective performance of the functions of the Secretary-General as the Chief Administrative Officer of the United Nations requires the possibility of exercising genuine and unencumbered decision-making authority, often at short notice. This discretionary authority provides for a flexible cadre of immediate assistants who are highly capable and possess the necessary expertise to deal with a multitude of issues, some of which are of a continuing nature, while others are temporary or episodic. Hence, when deciding on appointments in his Executive Office, the Secretary-General, taking into account qualifications, skills and experience, as well as the need to have the broadest possible geographical distribution and gender balance, has to be able quickly to select candidates that are best qualified to perform complex and sensitive tasks. Quite often, the needed expertise is available within the Organization and the Secretary-General is empowered to bring the relevant staff into his Executive Office as soon as required. However, this action separates the staff involved from their assigned posts. Logically, there should be a collateral arrangement, allowing the Secretary-General to exercise discretionary power for outposting staff from his Executive Office as well, which would ensure that the career opportunities of these staff members are not jeopardized.

3. In accordance with resolution 51/226, the Secretary-General has been exercising his discretionary power of appointment and promotion in respect of staff placed in his Executive Office. However, when staff members are released from that Office, their appropriate placement is hampered by the established existing rules and policies. In the interest of good management and in order not to penalize the staff that have been temporarily exempted from the normal career development pattern by being placed in the Executive Office of the Secretary-General outside the established placement and promotion procedures, it is proposed to establish outplacement policies and procedures for such staff.

4. In the view of the Secretary-General, this approach is fully consistent with the goals regarding mobility of staff set out in his report on human resources management reform (A/55/253 and Corr.1), namely, to ensure that the Organization is able to move people between functions, departments, occupational groups and duty stations in order to meet its operational requirements. It is also in line with staff regulation 1.2 (c), which establishes that staff members are subject to the authority of the Secretary-General and to assignment by him to any of the activities or offices of the United Nations. In essence, the proposed procedures would assimilate the situation of the Secretary-General to that already existing for heads of department, where established procedures provide them discretionary authority for lateral movements of staff within their own department or office (the Secretary-General, as Chief Administrative Officer, would thus have the same authority within the Organization).

5. Given the above considerations, the Secretary-General believes it to be in the best interests of the Organization to implement a system that would allow him to decide to place the staff members who serve in his Executive Office in suitable vacancies in the Secretariat, either before or after such a vacant post has been advertised. This discretionary authority would be limited to staff members recruited under the established procedures set out in staff rules 104.14 and 104.15, who were subsequently requested to serve in the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, at the General Service, Professional and Director (D-1, D-2) levels, and would require consultation with the heads of departments or offices concerned. Promulgation of this policy would not require any change in the existing staff regulations and rules and can be made through the issuance of a Secretary-General's bulletin.

6. The Secretary-General seeks the approval of the General Assembly for this proposal.